

The University of Chicago

THE AMERICAN CHURCHES AND
THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

DECEMBER, 1940

By
WILLIAM ARCHIBALD KARRAKER

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It has been shown in the preceding chapters that church attitudes toward the War with Spain possess an interest and importance which transcends the bounds of church history narrowly conceived. At times with remarkable consonance, again with a wide diversification of views, on practically every wartime issue, through pulpit, press, or convention platform, the churches expressed these attitudes freely and with conviction. This prerogative they exercised alongside or concurrently with that of other influential groups such as lodges and political, commercial, and business organizations. A knowledge of them, therefore, as has been seen, apart from any consideration of the cultural values involved, and viewed solely as an influence operative in the sphere of the creation of a dynamic public opinion (at a time when an enlightened and dynamic public opinion on national affairs was at such a premium), is essential to an adequate understanding and appreciation of this portion of American history. These expressions of opinion as they relate to a score or more of the larger issues and interests and to some four score minor and subsidiary ones have been considered; it now remains to pass in quick review the more significant findings and conclusions which appertain to them.

The records of the prewar period show that an unmistakable connection exists between those attitudes of the late 90's which motivated the declaration of war and those which obtained a generation earlier. As between the sordidly political and annexational sentiment which characterized our relations with Cuba and Spain during the ante bellum period of the American Civil War, and the nobler, more purified commercial and humanitarian interests of the post bellum period, the connection is indisputably with the latter. These latter, motivating interests are clearly discernible (though frequently in a more or less nascent state) during the period of the Ten Years' War (1868-1878), but espe-

cially during the fortnight or so following the "Virginius" episode (October 31, 1873), when church journalistic opinion, both as to tone and content, was very much the same as that which characterized the years 1895-1898. The attitudes cherished during the Ten Years' War, therefore, bear a genetic relationship to those which precipitated the war in 1898, and, their consideration (even though it be largely a study of origins), manifestly forms an organic part of the present study. Issues such as arbitration, legitimate casus belli, sanctity of international law, rights of humanity, filibustering, Cuban slavery, annexation, the sensational press, and Spanish "atrocities" were all discussed, and, immediately following the "Virginius" affair, with considerable fullness and feeling.

During the Final Insurrection (1895-1898), church interest became more sustained and intensified and was characterized especially by an unbounded sympathy for the suffering Cubans who were believed to be the victims of Spanish atrocity. The rights of humanity now became the all-compelling incentive to action, and, when all other means of intervention (as arbitration, filibustering, and recognition of belligerent rights) had been considered and abandoned, succeeded in precipitating the war. The one event most responsible for this precipitation of the war was generally conceded to be, not the "Maine" disaster, but the speech in Congress on the Cuban situation which was delivered by Senator Proctor of Vermont.

Immediately following the outbreak of the war the churches, while expressing a hope for an early peace, vied with each other in their generous declarations of loyalty to the Government; they took a keen interest in the problems connected with mobilization; and, almost without exception, they were vociferous in their justification of the war--stressing particularly its obvious inevitability consequent to the failure of arbitration and of any modification by Spain of her Cuban policy. Extraordinary perspicacity was displayed by the pulpit and religious press in their analyses of events such as the Manila (and later the Caribbean) victory, as respects, for example, their significance for American international status and missionary and territorial expansion.

As the weeks advanced other issues came more and more into the limelight of discussion, including preëminently a scath-

ing denunciation of the sensational press. This was accompanied, naturally, with an expression of appreciation of the function and worth and a challenge to higher efficiency of the religious press as a countervailing agency. With scarcely less assiduity the attitudes of the various European states toward the American war policy were watched, appraised, and reported--with an almost morbid fear lest, peradventure, they might occasionally prove to be unfavorable to us. Hence, the churches were solicitous that the United States at all times should conduct her wartime affairs in every detail with meticulous care, lest she compromise, or seem to compromise those high ideals which motivated her entrance into the war, and the world lose thereby the beautiful object lesson of pledged and unbroken renunciation of self-interest which she was so uniquely privileged at the outset to provide. Toward the proposed Anglo-Saxon Alliance the churches were favorably disposed provided it be a "moral alliance" and not essentially a political or military one.

Following the naval triumph off Santiago the churches became confirmed in their belief that this was a providential war. The parallelism between the American victories and those of Israel in Biblical times were generally held to be conclusive proof of this, notwithstanding the fact that a few voices contended that marvelous victory is not necessarily an indication of divine favor. America's rôle as a first-rate power was now proclaimed as indisputable. On a number of issues relating to the conduct of certain high officials and governmental departments, the church press now expressed its attitude with firm decision--generally though with unbounded charity and with suspended judgment until all the facts could be ascertained. Thus was the elderly and excessively corpulent General Shafter befriended against the charges by his critics of incompetence for arduous duties in a tropical climate; thus, in the altercation which developed between Admiral Sampson and Commodore Schley, was the official conduct of each officer justified; thus, for the defeated but gentlemanly Admiral Cervera was there nothing but unstinted praise; thus, were Secretary Alger and his Department benevolently adjudged at the first; but as the evidence of neglect and incompetence continued to accumulate, this charitable judgment gave way to a chorus of denunciation with insistent demands for an investigation, which was ordered forthright--an excellent example of vigorous and resource-

ful church leadership operative in the creation of public opinion on issues of great national moment. That the church journals were capable of administering acerbic criticism when they adjudged the facts to be of a nature to warrant it, is further attested by their treatment of the foibles of Lieutenant Hobson. Toward General Garcia and the Cuban allies there was exercised as much charity of judgment as the facts would warrant.

Three major interests belong equally to both periods of the war, that is, to the war as a whole. Of these none were kept more continuously in the spotlight of attention than the moral and religious imperatives incumbent upon the churches incident to the unwholesome exigencies of the war. The church press literally teemed with the publication of letters and articles descriptive of the status and need of camp evangelism, Christian literature for the camps, religious work with the navy, and kindred needs, with urgent pleas for financial aid and the contribution of religious books and journals. Against the army canteen all the vials of wrath were poured out including, especially, innumerable resolutions and overtures from the various church assemblies, large and small.

"Imperialism," with its storm center in the question of the acquisition of the Philippines, became one of the most hotly contested issues of the war. The enthusiasm of the annexationists had its rootage in convictions such as our alleged fitness for expansion as evidenced by our historic policy and our partaking of the Anglo-Saxon genius for empire; and by America's divinely appointed duty to take up "the white man's burden"--though strategic and commercial considerations were by no means wanting. Paradoxically as it may seem the influential, though numerically inferior anti-annexationist group reached opposite conclusions from the selfsame premises. Our Constitution, our genius, our tradition, and our history, all conclusively prove, they contended, that we are unfitted to govern alien lands and peoples. On an issue of such moment, however, it was wholesome indeed, in view of the need for full and free public discussion, that a responsible and powerful minority of church opinion should have challenged the popular view.

Missionary opportunity as a wartime interest--so conspicuously absent during the prewar period--had its inception in the Manila victory, and by midsummer became a major objective. With

the new conception of missionary obligation came a concerted interdenominational effort to avoid wastage of funds and duplication of services in the evangelization of the islands whose acquisition appeared imminent. The "ecumenical" missionary conference which was held on July 13, 1898, and which laid the groundwork for the new comity, truly marked the beginning of a new epoch in the conduct of the American missionary enterprise.

Throughout the period of peace negotiations the church journals were on the qui vive to cover for their readers every aspect of the multifarious problems involved. Though somewhat surprised at the early conclusion of the war, they welcomed it, and gave wide publicity to the terms of the protocol. Delight in the fact that the Catholic Church was to be represented on the Commission (though the Catholic member, unfortunately, eventually, refused the post), was almost universally proclaimed and reiterated. The preparations preliminary to the opening of the sessions were diligently reported, and in the drawing up of the treaty every problem and issue was discussed and appraised with especial attention being devoted to the problems connected with the Spanish debt and the Pacific islands. The President's leadership and instructions to the Commission were discussed at length and with almost universal approbation. In view of the fact that the President played such an important rôle in the direction of the negotiations; that he was weeks in making up his mind on some of the most crucial problems connected with the terms; that he himself possessed strong religious convictions and was peculiarly sensitive to the declared attitudes of church groups on these weighty issues; and that the churches left no stone unturned in getting before him the results of their deliberations--it is doubtful indeed if any other group wielded a more compelling influence at this juncture and, hence, in this sense, became ultimately so responsible for the formulation of the policies then and there adopted (some of which rank among the most epoch-making in our history), than did the churches. In other words, the solution at the peace table of that plexus of problems (the like of which few have ever been more baffling and far-reaching in their consequences)--simply cannot be adequately understood apart from a knowledge of the attitude of the churches.

Finally, the churches were tremendously concerned with the prospect for future Christian expansion. They foresaw that

the high geared missionary forward movement program which they were ready and eager to launch must be supplemented with education, and they accordingly made generous provision for its inclusion and effective functioning. In their planning and launching of programs there obtained throughout an interdenominational comity which was superbly beautiful--an object lesson to the world, as it were, in co-operative relationships, worthy and deserving of the name Christian. While Catholics and Protestants frequently did not see eye to eye respecting the missionary objectives, and were engaged in much discussional sparring regarding the same, yet withal, there obtained, generally speaking, a remarkable spirit of toleration and forbearance.

Thus, on a multitude of wartime issues and interests, ranging from the most transitory to the most consequential, from pulpit, press, and convention floor, the churches spoke their mind: not with apology, not with fear and trepidation, not with uncertain sound; but with fullness, frankness, confident assurance, and, above all, with high ethical conviction. In making their impact on public opinion they utilized a combination of techniques to an extent scarcely available to other groups. Not only were they socially respected and numerically formidable but they possessed a common Christian ideology which, on many of the wartime issues, tended toward a definite and distinctive predilection. As a countervailing influence against the insidious effect of the sensational press, they possessed their own press which, for subscription coverage, quality of content, independence of thought, and high ethical outlook was unequalled, perhaps, by that of any other group. The subject matter which issued in a perennial stream from this press and which comprised, generally speaking, a discussion of all phases of the war was leisurely read and digested by individual readers in numberless homes. This formed the basis for many family and neighborhood discussions. Convictions were deepened when similar discussions ensued at the regular church, Sunday school, and midweek gatherings. The grand climax came, of course, with the preaching of the "war sermon" (seldom printed though admittedly very popular), which was frequently tintured if not shot through with the spirit and content of the output of the church press. Convention reports, too, were most effective in solidifying sentiment. Attitudes once crystallized by church groups became efficacious first, through conta-

gious exposure to outside groups, thus leavening the entire social lump; and secondly, through countless memorials sent to the officials at Washington.

At a time, therefore, when the old landmarks were being reëxamined and America stood at the cross roads of her international policy; when the voices of counsel became a babble and the secular press all too frequently proved renegade; when momentous decisions had to be made, sometimes with lightninglike dispatch; when wise counsel was at its highest possible premium: the illuminating, stabilizing, direction-giving impress of church attitude toward these wartime issues on the crystallization of the public opinion of the nation as a whole--was indeed an extraordinarily significant contribution.

